

**Region 4**  
**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**  
**Science and Ecosystem Support Division**  
**Athens, Georgia**

**OPERATING PROCEDURE**

**Title: Global Positioning System**

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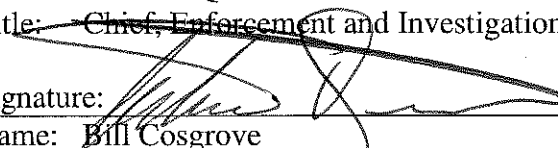
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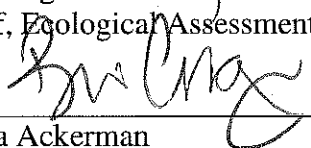
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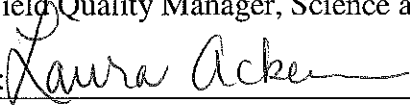
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## Revision History

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This table shows changes to this controlled document over time. The most recent version is presented in the top row of the table. Previous versions of the document are maintained by the SESD Field Quality Manager.

History	Effective Date
<p>SESDPROC-110-R2, <i>Global Positioning System</i>, replaces SESDPROC-110-R01</p> <p><b>Title Page</b> Changed title for Antonio Quinones from Environmental Investigations Branch to Enforcement and Investigations Branch. Changed Bill Cosgrove's title from Acting Chief to Chief.</p> <p><b>Section 1.4</b> Alphabetized and added a reference.</p>	November 1, 2007
<p>SESDPROC-110-R1, <i>Global Positioning System</i>, replaces SESDPROC-110-R0</p> <p>This revision reflects the following changes:</p> <p><b>General</b> Extensive rewrite with additional information added to most sections. Brian Striggow added as coauthor.</p> <p><b>Section 2.1</b> Rewritten description of GPS system. Descriptions of "GPS Accuracy Factors" and "Differential GPS" isolated as separate subsections.</p> <p><b>Section 2.2</b> This Section, titled "Requirements for Locational Information" inserted. Supplies guidance on accuracy requirements for various study types and potential means used to obtain requisite accuracy. Subsection on datums and data formats included.</p> <p><b>Section 2.3</b> "Quality Control Procedures", previously numbered as Section 2.2. Most information in this section moved to Section 2.1 discussion of Accuracy Factors and Section 2.4 discussion of specific receivers. Explicit statement added that no specific GPS quality control procedures are required for most SESD studies.</p> <p><b>Section 2.4</b></p>	October 1, 2007

Information added to sections on Trimble and Garmin receivers.	
<b>Section 2.5</b> Issue of electronic data-logging addressed. Storage of electronic data records addressed.	
SESDPROC-110-R0, Global Positioning System, Original Issue	March 22, 2007

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# Contents

## **1 General Information**

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### **1.1 Purpose**

This document describes the Global Positioning System (GPS) and procedures, methods and considerations to be used and observed when using GPS to record location data in the field. Guidance is provided on accuracy requirements for various uses of location data and potential means to obtain the requisite accuracy. This document contains direction developed solely to provide internal guidance to SESD employees.

### **1.2 Scope/Application**

The procedures contained in this document are to be used by SESD field investigators when using the Global Positioning System to obtain the geographical coordinates of sampling locations and/or measurements during field investigations. In SESD investigations, GPS is the preferred means of collecting horizontal location information. In most cases the accuracy of GPS is unsuitable for collection of elevation data.

On the occasion that SESD field personnel determine that any of the procedures described in this section cannot be used to obtain the required coordinate information and alternate procedures are employed, the alternate procedure will be documented in the field log book, along with a description of the circumstances requiring its use. GPS users must be currently qualified as proficient in the operation of the specific GPS equipment to be used. The manufacturer's operation manuals should be used for detailed information on the use of specific GPS equipment.

### **1.3 Documentation/Verification**

This procedure was prepared by persons deemed technically competent by SESD management, based on their knowledge, skills and abilities and has been tested in practice and reviewed in print by a subject matter expert. The official copy of this procedure resides on the H: drive of the SESD local area network. The Field Quality Manager is responsible for ensuring the most recent version of the procedure is placed on the H: drive and for maintaining records of review conducted prior to its issuance.

## 1.4 References

Rand Corporation, The Global Positioning System, Assessing National Policies, Appendix B, GPS History, Chronology, and Budgets, 1995

SESD Operating Procedure for Control of Records, SESDPROC-002, Most Recent Version

Trimble® Navigation Limited, Mapping Systems General Reference, Revision B, 1996.

USEPA, Global Position Systems – Technical Implementation Guidance, Office of Environmental Information (EPA/250/R-03/001), 2003.

USEPA, GIS Technical Memorandum 3. Global Positioning Systems – Technology and It's Application in Environmental Programs, Research and Development (PM-225). EPA/600/R-92/036, 1992.

USEPA, Locational Data Policy, Office of Information Resources Management, IRM Policy Manual 2100 Chapter 13, 1991.

## 2 Methodology

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### 2.1 General

#### 2.1.1 GPS Description

The Navigation Satellite Time and Ranging (NAVSTAR) Global Positioning System (GPS) is a worldwide radio-navigation system created by the U. S. Department of Defense (DOD) to provide navigation, location, and timing information for military operations. System testing using a limited number of satellites began in 1978 with the system being declared fully operational in 1995. The system was declared available for civilian uses in the 1980s and has seen burgeoning civilian application for navigation and mapping.

The GPS system consists of three basic elements: the space segment, control segment, and user segment. The space segment consists of the constellation of up to 24 active NAVSTAR satellites in six orbital tracks. The satellites are not in geo-synchronous orbit and are in constant motion relative to a ground user. The control segment consists of several ground stations that serve as uplinks to the satellites and that make adjustments to satellite orbits and clocks when necessary. The user segment consists of the GPS receiver which will typically consist of an antenna, multi-channel receiver, and processing unit.

For the purposes of this document, the user segment GPS receivers may be loosely grouped into Recreational and Navigational receivers (henceforth referred to as General Use receivers), Mapping Grade receivers, and Survey Grade receivers.

- Most General Use grade receivers are available on the retail market to consumers for a variety of applications including boating, hiking, and automotive navigation. They display an instantaneous reading of position and are generally not optimized for data collection. Waypoints containing instantaneous position fixes can often be stored and downloaded. The accuracy of these receivers is adequate for many environmental applications.
- Mapping Grade receivers are used for applications such as resource management and Geographical Information System (GIS) feature collection. The receivers are capable of averaging multiple position fixes for greater accuracy and then data-logging the results with sufficient information to post-correct the positions as described below. The potential accuracy that can be achieved may be better than one meter.

- Survey Grade receivers can provide accuracy at the centimeter level by using long occupation times and special techniques for receiver use and data processing. Survey Grade receivers are not used by SESD in field investigations.

GPS receivers derive positions by simultaneously measuring the distance (range) to several satellites in precisely known orbits, and using triangulation of the ranges to calculate a unique position for the receiver. The range to each satellite is determined by precisely measuring the transit time of radio signals broadcast from the satellites.

### ***2.1.2 GPS Accuracy Factors***

The accuracy of the basic GPS system is approximately 15m. GPS accuracy can be affected by a number of factors including the Selective Availability feature, atmospheric delays, satellite clock and orbit errors, multipath signals, signal strength, and satellite geometry relative to the user.

In the early GPS implementation, the DOD used a feature known as Selective Availability (SA) to degrade the quality and subsequent accuracy of the GPS signals to non-DOD users. With Selective Availability enabled, accuracy of position fixes could be as poor as 100m without the use of differential correction techniques described below. Currently there is no SA limitation in accuracy in place with a stated Executive Branch intention to not return to the use of the SA signal degradation.

As satellites move in their orbits and some signals are blocked by obstructions, the geometry of the available satellite signals relative to the user will constantly change. When the satellites with available signals are clustered closely together in the sky, small errors in range will result in large errors in reported position. Conversely, when the satellites are distributed more broadly across the sky, the resultant position errors will be at their minimum. The general measure of this phenomenon is Dilution of Precision (DOP), which may be represented as Position Dilution of Precision (PDOP), or more specifically for geographical coordinate collection, Horizontal Dilution of Precision (HDOP). Mapping and Survey Grade receivers generally can calculate and display DOP and allow the user to limit logging to times when the higher potential accuracy conditions of low DOP prevail. General Use receivers may display DOP and use DOP with other factors to estimate a general accuracy figure. DOP may range from approximately 2 to 50, with high quality work usually requiring a HDOP of less than 4-6.

Signal strength and multipath signals relate to the strength and quality of the signal reaching the receiver antenna. Signal attenuation by the atmosphere, buildings, and tree cover limit the accuracy of the ranges obtained. The measure of signal strength is Signal to Noise Ratio (SNR), generally measured in decibels(db). Most receivers of any grade will display the SNR of the satellite signals in a bar graph or table. Mapping Grade Receivers generally allow the user to specify a minimum signal strength for the use of a satellite signal (commonly 2-15db). Poor signal strength can be resolved by waiting for satellite locations to change or moving the receiver location. Multipath signals result



from portions of the satellite signal bouncing off terrain, structures, or atmospheric disturbances, resulting in a degraded total signal. Higher quality Mapping Grade receivers may be capable of rejecting the stray multipath signals, such as Trimble® receivers using Everest™ technology.

### ***2.1.3 Differential GPS***

Selective Availability, clock errors, and orbital errors affect all GPS users and atmospheric delays affect all users over a relatively wide region. A second GPS receiver in the same general area as the user will experience the same errors from these sources as the user's receiver. Consequently, correction factors from a remote station at a known location can be applied to the user's receiver in a process known as Differential GPS (DGPS). DGPS can be applied in real-time using additional radio signals, or after the collection event by a method called post-correction.

Real-time DGPS uses established networks of base stations at precisely surveyed locations. The US Coast Guard operates a system of 80 base stations which became fully operational in 1999. The range corrections are broadcast on marine radiobeacon frequencies, with redundant coverage of most of the US coastline and the Mississippi River. There is near complete single beacon coverage of most of the internal US, but there are known gaps in coverage in both EPA Region 4 and the US as a whole. The system is sometimes referred to using the more general term DGPS or in nomenclature referring to the beacon-based nature of the system. Beacon-based DGPS is implemented primarily in Navigational and Mapping Grade receivers.

Real-time DGPS can also be implemented with a Space Based Augmentation System (SBAS). The most common SBAS currently used in the United States is the Wide Area Augmentation System (WAAS), developed by the Federal Aviation Administration to meet the additional demands on GPS for aircraft navigation. The WAAS network of base stations collects information on satellite clock errors, orbital errors, and atmospheric conditions. The error information is transferred to satellites in geo-synchronous orbits and subsequently broadcast to suitably equipped GPS receivers on frequencies compatible with the GPS range signals. While beacon-based DGPS passes range corrections to the receivers, WAAS communicates a model for the errors which is capable of providing more accurate corrections. Current Mapping Grade receivers will likely use WAAS with or without the option of beacon-based DGPS. All but the least expensive General Use receivers are generally equipped with WAAS differential correction capability.

Post-Corrected DGPS is generally accomplished by downloading the receiver survey files to a desktop or laptop computer and then retrieving correction files for the same time period (generally via the internet) from an established base station in the area of the survey. Post-processed accuracy improves with proximity of the base station to the surveyed locations and base station data should be used from a station within 300km of the site surveyed. The survey positions are processed by application software and a new

set of positions is generated using the correction data. The capability for post-processed differential correction is generally limited to Mapping Grade and Survey Grade receivers.

Various factors limit GPS accuracy in the vertical plane to approximately half of that obtainable in the horizontal plane, i.e., if a location fix is accurate to 3 m in the horizontal plane, it may only be accurate to 6 m in the vertical plane. Since relatively high accuracy is usually required for the uses of elevation data, GPS is rarely used to obtain and report elevations.

## **2.2 Requirements for Locational Information**

### ***2.2.1 Data Uses***

Locational information can serve many purposes in an environmental investigation, a few of which are listed below:

1. Providing an unambiguous means to identify facilities or sampling plats.
2. Providing locational information to key analytical data in a GIS based data archiving system to the original sampling locations.
3. Differentiating watersheds
4. Providing information to calculate extents and volumes of contamination
5. Providing a means to relocate the media represented by samples for removal or treatment.
6. Providing information to prepare presentation graphics of sampling locations.

Depending on the specific uses for the data and the type of work being performed, there will be different needs for the accuracy of the locational data. Studies where a sample represents a large area of relatively homogeneous material would not require the same accuracy as the location of a permanent monitoring well. Below are broad guidelines for the accuracy that might be required for different applications.

<b>Desired Accuracy</b>	<b>Application</b>
100 m	Open ocean work where sample is presumed to be representative of a large area
20 m	Open water work (lakes or estuaries) where sample is presumed to be representative of a large area
10 m	Stream and river work where samples are presumed to be broadly representative of a reach
5-3 m	Stream work where samples are representative of a specific narrowly defined section
10 m	Air Monitoring Stations
10-3 m	Microscale air monitoring
3-1 m	Permanent monitoring wells
1 m	Locations of 'Hot Spots' destined for removal of limited areal extent
3-1 m	Locations of Temporary groundwater wells in plumes requiring narrow delineation
3 m	Locations of Temporary groundwater wells in broad plumes
3 m	Locations of environmental samples with sample spacing >20 m
5 m	Locations of environmental samples with sample spacing >60 m
200-20 m	Coordinates describing a facility where mobile waste units are sampled
30-3 m	Locations of industrial process areas or NPDES permitted facilities where the sampling locations are described in field notes relative to the process or site features

Specific demands of a study may drive increased or decreased requirements for accuracy. The preferred means of locational data collection for most studies will be GPS, although alternate means are permissible if they meet accuracy requirements. The following table indicates the accuracy that may be expected from various means of establishing coordinates.

<b>Accuracy</b>	<b>Description</b>
200-50 m	Map Derived, coarse work
40 -20 m	Map Derived, fine work or using GIS with digital imagery
15 m	General Use Grade GPS, w/o WAAS
5 m	General Use Grade GPS, w/ WAAS or beacon corrections
10 m	Mapping Grade GPS, no corrections, averaged readings,
3 m	Mapping Grade GPS w/ differential correction, averaged readings
1 m	Mapping Grade GPS w/ differential correction, controlled DOP and SNR, averaged readings
10cm	Surveying Grade GPS or optical surveying (dependent on baseline length)

Accuracy is a term used to describe the degree of conformity of a measurement. In GPS, accuracy is usually specified as an estimate of the radius from the measured coordinates that is likely to include the actual coordinates. The estimate is based on several standard deviations probability of including the actual point in the measurement. As such, it is recognized that some measurements will fall outside of the specified accuracy. For the purposes of SESD GPS work, the nominal accuracy figures derived from manufacturer's literature for specific

operating conditions, displayed by the receiver at the time of feature collection, or output from processing software will be taken at face value.

### 2.2.2 *Datums and Data formats*

In general, a datum is a reference from which other measurements are taken. In the development of surveying systems by civil entities, different datums were used as base references that will result in differing coordinates for the same location. A GPS receiver will generally display coordinates in a number of different user-selected datums. **Unless there are specific requirements on a project, all SESD work should be conducted using the WGS84 datum.** Alternatively, the nearly equivalent NAD83 datum may be used if WGS84 is unavailable as a receiver option. If an alternate coordinate system is used where coordinates are obtained and recorded in field logbooks, the use of the alternate coordinate system should also be noted in the logbook.

The SESD Data Archival and Retrieval System (DART) requires that coordinates for sample locations be entered in the WGS84 datum and dd.ddddddd format. Unless specific project requirements dictate otherwise, all coordinates explicitly stated in reports will be in WGS84 format and in all cases the datum used will be specified.

There is no SESD policy on significant digits for GPS information, and accuracy should not be implied from the presence of significant digits in reported coordinates. However, good scientific practice should be followed in the presentation of locational information in order that useful information not be truncated or a higher degree of accuracy implied. The following table shows the incremental distance in latitude represented by the least significant digit for various coordinate formats:

<b>dd.ddddddd°</b>	Approximately 4" or 10 cm
<b>dd.ddddd°</b>	Approximately 44" or 1.1 m
<b>dd.ddddd°</b>	Approximately 36' or 11 m
<b>dd°mm'ss"</b>	Approximately 100' or 30 m
<b>dd°mm'ss.x"</b>	Approximately 10' or 3 m
<b>dd°mm'ss.xx"</b>	Approximately 1' or 30 cm
<b>dd°mm.xxxx'</b>	Approximately 7" or 18 cm
<b>dd°mm.xxx'</b>	Approximately 6' or 1.8 m
<b>dd°mm.xx'</b>	Approximately 60' or 18 m

## 2.3 Quality Control Procedures

By nature of its origin in the DOD and recent application to aircraft navigation, the GPS is designed for high reliability. GPS failures resulting in an incorrect reading beyond the bounds of known errors are so rare that the possibility can be ignored for most SESD studies. If a study requires the verification of receiver function, this can be accomplished by verifying that a receiver displays the correct position while occupying a known benchmark.

## 2.4 Special Considerations

The application will dictate the type of receiver used. There are several specific considerations for the use of the various receiver types.

### *2.4.1 Special considerations for the use of Trimble® Mapping Grade Receivers*

The suggested settings for Trimble® receivers are:

1. Position mode: Overdetermined 3D (or manual 3D if only 4 satellites are visible)
2. Elevation mask: 15 degrees
3. PDOP: 6
4. Signal to noise ratio (SNR) mask: 6
5. Dynamics code: Land
6. Logging interval: 1 second for points, 5 seconds for lines and areas
7. Audible click: Yes
8. Log DOP data: Yes
9. Coordinate System: Geographic Datum WGS84

When using Trimble® Geoexplorer receivers, the option of using the accuracy 'slider bar' display may be used to consolidate many of the above parameters. The slider bar position must be positioned at midscale or towards the 'Precision' end of the scale to achieve 1m accuracy work. When conducting work requiring less accuracy, the slider should be initially positioned midscale and may be adjusted toward the 'Production' end of the scale if the higher level of accuracy can not be maintained.

The receivers may be configured to force real-time position correction. The use of real-time correction reduces the risk of being unable to obtain appropriate post-correction files, but may limit productivity when differential signals cannot be received or are intermittent. The use of forced real-time vs. post-correction is an

operator decision. If the positions are not to be downloaded and the accuracy of differential correction is required, it will be necessary to force real-time correction.

Trimble® receivers at SEDS contain a data dictionary that can facilitate the management of GIS data. If the COC\_GIS dictionary is selected at the time of file creation, SEDS standard media codes can be assigned to features at the time of logging that will accompany the data through the download process. The use of the COC\_GIS data dictionary can simplify the management of the data when processed in a GIS system or when entered into the DART system.

The logging interval of most Trimble® GPS receivers defaults to a 5 second interval. This may be changed to a 1 second interval to expedite feature collection. A point feature should have a minimum of 36 positions logged to obtain the additional accuracy afforded by averaging positions. After a minimum of 36 positions are logged and the feature is closed, the averaged position can be obtained by selecting the feature on the 'Map' screen. The averaged position should always be the one entered into field notebooks.

Some Trimble® receivers may only display data in dd°mm'ss.sss" format. If the coordinates are downloaded and processed through Pathfinder Office software, they can be output in the dd.dddddd (or any other) format. If the coordinates were only recorded in field logbooks, they can be converted to decimal degrees as follows:

Converting to decimal degrees (dd.dddddd) from degrees°minutes'seconds" (dd°mm'ss.sss"):

$$dd.dddddd = dd + (mm/60) + (ss.sss/3600)$$

Example: Convert 33°28'45.241" to decimal degrees

$$33 + (28/60) + (45.241/3600) = 33.479236$$

The reverse conversion is accomplished as follows:

Converting to degrees°minutes'seconds" from decimal degrees

Starting with dd.dddddd

Multiply .dddddd by 60 to obtain mm.mmmm

Multiply .mmmm by 60 to obtain ss.sss

Then dd°mm'ss.sss" = dd & mm & ss.sss

Example: Convert 33.479236 to dd°mm'ss.sss" format

Multiply .479236 by 60 to obtain 28.7540 (mm.mmmm)

Multiply .7540 by 60 to obtain 45.241 (ss.sss)

Dd°mm'ss.sss" = 33° & 28' & 45.241" = 33°28'45.241"

#### ***2.4.2 Special considerations for the use of Garmin General Use Grade receivers***

The standard format for navigational purposes is decimal minutes (dd°mm.mmm'). This format is utilized due to the fact that nautical navigation charts are set up in this format. However, location information must be converted to a decimal degree (dd.ddddd°) format in order for GIS software to properly interpret the information. The conversion is accomplished by dividing the minutes portion of the coordinates by 60.

Converting to decimal degrees from decimal minutes:

$dd.ddddd^{\circ} = dd + (mm.mmm/60)$

Example: Convert 81°49.386 degrees to decimal degrees

$81 + (49.386/60) = 81.8231$  degrees

The reverse conversion is accomplished as follows:

$dd^{\circ}mm.mmm' = dd \& (.dddd*60)$

Example: Convert 81.8231 degrees to decimal minutes (dd°mm.mmm')

Multiply .8231 by 60 to obtain 49.386 (mm.mmm)

$81^{\circ} \& 49.386' = 81^{\circ}49.386'$

GPS users need to familiarize themselves with the differences between the two formats, as they appear similar. Spreadsheets can automate the conversion process.

## **2.5 Records**

The GPS coordinates and the SESD equipment identification number of the GPS receiver should be recorded in field logbooks at the time of GPS coordinate collection. The data

logging capability of receivers may be used in lieu of the requirement to record the coordinates in logbooks when the following conditions can be met:

1. The location can easily be found later if it needs to be resurveyed prior to demobilization. A permanent monitoring well can easily be resurveyed, while most open-water work would not afford this opportunity.
2. The data is downloaded and ascertained to meet the accuracy requirements for the project prior to demobilization from the site.
3. The data is stored in at least two separate locations for transport, such as a laptop hard drive and a flash drive or compact disc.

In all cases where positions are electronically recorded, the provisions of the Electronic Records section of the SESD Operating Procedure for Control of Records (SESDPROC-002) should be followed.

Where locational data is collected and processed electronically, but not reported explicitly in the final report, a copy of the coordinates in text format should be output and entered into the project file in paper or electronic form. The output should include:

1. Latitude, generally in dd.ddddddd format.
2. Longitude, generally in dd.ddddddd format
3. Date of collection
4. DOP information where it supports the accuracy requirements
5. Correction status of each point where it supports the accuracy requirements.
6. The datum used for the export

Trimble® Pathfinder Office will create files with this information by exporting to a text file. The information will be contained in the .pos and .inf files.